MENTAL SKILLS TRAINING COMMISSIONING AND EVALUATION TOOLKIT

IMPROVING OUTCOMES IN YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS OR AT RISK

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St Basils
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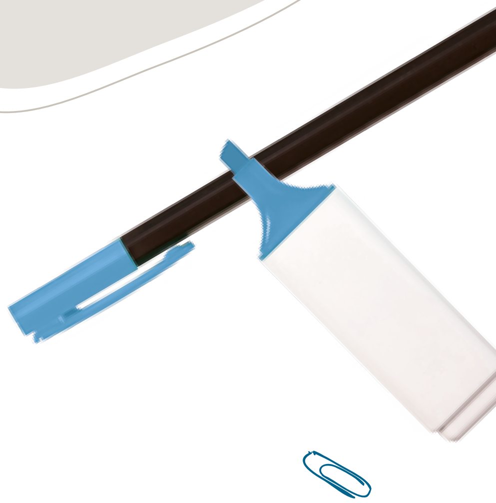

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INTRODUCTION
TO THE TOOLKIT

We are delighted to present this *Mental Skills Training* Commissioning and Evaluation Toolkit. The aim of this toolkit is to help commissioners, service providers and policy-makers to commission and evaluate strengths-based approaches for improving outcomes in young people and adults with complex and multiple support needs.

This toolkit is based on the learning and evidence from My Strengths Training for Life™ (MST4Life™) with St Basils; a psychologically informed programme that has already been successfully delivered to young people experiencing homelessness or at risk across the West Midlands.

This third resource complements the Mental Skills Training Toolkit and accompanying Delivery Guide that were developed as part of the SPRINT project at the University of Birmingham, in collaboration with housing charity St Basils, service users and the wider youth homelessness sector, namely Homeless Link. The Mental Skills Training Toolkit is a set of practical, easy-to-use mental skills training resources to help young people recognise and develop key strengths to improve their resilience and well-being. The Delivery Guide supports delivery of the Mental Skills Training Toolkit content, according to best psychological practice.

You can view a video from the recent launch event of the Mental Skills Training Toolkit here: **youtu.be/Gr2aU0XqLBQ**

This resource for commissioning and evaluation is an additional resource for services and policy-makers to develop new, or adapt existing, strengths-based support. We use the MST4Life™ programme here as a case-study of a strengths-based intervention for young people experiencing homelessness. However, strengths-based approaches more broadly can be extended and successfully applied to a variety of groups.

All of the resources here are based on the evidence and learning from MST4Life™ and this programme can be commissioned directly from St Basils. To ensure our resources remain helpful and impactful, we rely upon feedback from service providers. We would love to hear from you, using the comments section of our website (**www.sprintproject.org**), on how you are using any of our resources and your suggestions for how we could improve upon our materials. You can also follow our story on Twitter using #MSTtoolkit #MST4Life.

University of Birmingham

CASE STUDY

STRENGTHS-BASED INTERVENTION: MST4LIFE™

A summary of the evidence for commissioners

Youth homelessness
Every year, an estimated 150,000 young people aged 16–24 approach their local authorities for help because they are at risk of homelessness[1]. It has been reported that 45% of residents in supported accommodation projects, for those who present as homeless, are young people[2]. Additionally, an estimated 6% of those who sleep rough in the UK are young people[3]. However, we know there are a significant number of unreported cases of homelessness among young people, meaning most published figures are likely to underestimate the scale of the issue.

According to a report by Homeless Link[4], 83% of homelessness services reported that increasing numbers of young people are presenting with greater and more complex needs. The main support needs that young people present with are: help to engage with employment, education or training; gaining independent living skills; coping with poor mental health; and dealing with isolation and loneliness[4]. This rise in the number of support needs is suggested to be due to a number of factors, including a lack of adequate interventions to support young people.

Causes and effects of youth homelessness
Homeless young people experience multiple and complex barriers to independence at an important point in their development towards adulthood[4]. For example, there are many drivers to homelessness, such as family breakdown, escaping abuse and violence, lack of affordable housing and leaving care[5 6]. When faced with complex trauma and social isolation, the transitional phase into adulthood is more challenging and can result in an increase in inequalities, affecting physical and mental health.

Homelessness is associated with increased risk of mortality[7], reduced quality of life and often substance misuse[8]. Many homeless young people are also not currently in education, employment or training (NEET) and lack independent living skills[5]. Youth homelessness constitutes an economic burden on public services such as on the health and judicial systems[7 8 9]. A background report[10] into the costs of homelessness in the UK breaks down public costs by service, and indicates that the estimated annual cost to the public per person experiencing homelessness is £34,518[11]. This figure translates to a total of roughly £1.38 billion[11]. NEET individuals who are homeless represent a cost of £19,504 per person annually, compared to £7,445 for those who are NEET and not homeless[9]. To tackle the personal and societal effects of homelessness outlined above, it is necessary to put effective interventions in place.

Strengths-based approach to tackle youth homelessness
The use of a strengths-based approach is widely advocated for working with young people experiencing homelessness[12 13]. This is due to its focus on innate individual strengths and potential, as opposed to deficits or problems.

Strengths-based techniques focus on supporting and encouraging young people to consistently work towards making positive changes in their lives[14 15].

> ***A strengths-based approach allows one to see opportunities, hope and solutions rather than just problems and hopelessness.***
>
> Hammond (2010) p. 4

Mental skills training for young people experiencing homelessness
Mental skills training (MST), as adapted from sport psychology, is a strengths-based approach that helps young people identify and develop personal qualities to build resilience and well-being. For example, MST can promote techniques known to have implications for young people experiencing homelessness, such as improving self-regulation strategies[16], encouraging intrinsic motivation[17], developing self-esteem[18] and nurturing adaptive coping strategies[19].

Young people experiencing homelessness recognise the need for mental skills to help them to successfully achieve their aspirations and gain independence[15]. By implementing interactive, group-based and enjoyable MST, young people can be supported to develop a variety of qualities, such as confidence, emotional control, motivation, resilience, self-awareness and social skills[15].

For this reason, community-engaged researchers from the School of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences at the University of Birmingham have collaborated with local housing charity St Basils to co-create and implement My Strengths Training for Life™ (MST4Life™), a programme that focuses on recognising and developing young people's strengths, to challenge adversity.

MST4Life™ programme
The MST4Life™ programme encourages the use of mental techniques, such as those used by elite athletes to enhance performance and maximise their potential. By focusing on young people's existing abilities and equipping them with the mental skills necessary to successfully navigate life, resilience and well-being can be increased. Due to its association with sport, MST4Life™ is also appealing and non-stigmatising for young people who find it more difficult to engage with services.

MST4Life™ outcomes and impact
There is strong evidence of the effectiveness and suitability of MST4Life™ as an intervention to improve the resilience of vulnerable 16–24-year-olds. The programme has already been successfully delivered to over 600 young people and improves participants' resilience, positive well-being and feelings of self-worth[20].

Most NEET young people who complete the programme will go on to engage with education, employment or training opportunities. Indeed, participating in MST4Life™ increases the chances of exiting homelessness and no longer being NEET by 30 percentage points over and above wrap-around support delivered in a psychologically informed environment[10]. MST4Life™ therefore contributed to the 37% reduction in Birmingham's statutory youth homelessness in the period of 2013–14 to 2017–18 when the national average increased by 34%[1].

Cost effectiveness of MST4Life™
Dr Liza Jabbour and Jade Siu of the Birmingham Business School[10] carried out an independent cost-benefit analysis of MST4Life™. Their analysis supported the programme's cost effectiveness, with savings found by supporting young people in their transition into securing accommodation and engaging in education, employment or training.

With fewer anticipated demands being placed on public services, the estimated net benefit of participation is between £134,777 (£677 per person) and £622,344 (£1,383 per person). When factoring in a predicted reduction in crime rate, the figures would be even higher. Further financial benefits on a more long-term basis could additionally be anticipated.

> ***... my confidence is shooting straight up. The way I speak to people, the way I'm working in a team. I've learned that I can handle myself in those situations a lot better than what I thought I could.***
>
> MST4Life™ Participant

Improving these outcomes provides public sector savings from forgone tax revenues, unemployment benefits and healthcare costs, leading to an estimated lifetime saving of £26,000,000 for the 1,040 NEET young people who exited homelessness in the first three years of the programme (figure based on a combination of MST4Life™ and St Basils' BOOST programme, another psychologically informed approach to tackling homelessness in young people).

PREFACE TO NEXT SECTION

When commissioning a programme there are three key stages to consider as part of your overall delivery model: Planning, Delivery and Evaluation. In this toolkit, we will outline important components of the Planning and Evaluation stages.

To learn more about delivery, see our Mental Skills Training Toolkit and delivery guide, available to download at **www.sprintproject.org**.

The plans suggested in this toolkit are for group-based programmes but these approaches can also be used as part of 1:1 work.

PLANNING

Why plan?

Effective planning will help provide structure to the programme and evaluation as part of your overall delivery model. A rigorous approach will increase confidence that any outcomes are due to the programme itself, rather than inconsistency in how or what has been delivered.

If done in a person-centred way (eg, including young people as part of the process), planning should result in a more relevant and meaningful programme, leading to increased 'buy-in', attendance and ultimately people getting more out of the programme. If you developed a programme without consulting stakeholders, key information might be missed about what content to include, the best methods of delivering it and the characteristics of the environment.

How do you plan?

We recommend starting with a stakeholder consultation. A stakeholder consultation is the process of identifying the individual and environmental requirements of young people to ensure the following programme is meaningful to those involved[21].

Consistent with a psychologically informed environment (PIE) and strengths-based approach, a stakeholder consultation is not just about identifying what is wrong with someone or addressing their 'needs'. Rather, this approach recognises existing strengths and uses this information to guide programme development and evaluation[21].

Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE): A PIE service or organisation utilises evidence-based psychological theories and models to guide practice to help ensure the emotional and psychological needs of their clients and staff are met[22].

Those who receive your programme are one of your primary stakeholders; however, others within the environment can provide different perspectives to give a more complete picture. For example, other stakeholders you may want to consider include: deliverers of the programme, who else works with the client (eg, support worker) and external partners or funders of the programme.

Although consulting multiple stakeholders adds rigour to the process, there might be conflicting perspectives (eg, staff think it is most important to develop emotion regulation, but young people think developing confidence is more important). In this case we recommend being young person led, as ultimately these are the people whose engagement and buy-in will lead to a more successful programme.

Benefits of stakeholder consultation

- Providing stakeholders with a sense of empowerment and ownership, resulting in greater future buy-in and engagement
- Understanding the specific goals for the particular target group
- Learning about the unique demands and values of the organisation – is the programme being delivered in a PIE or trauma-informed organisation? How can it be planned to be consistent with these principles?
- Insight into effectively integrating the programme into the existing offer
- A worthwhile investment of time, leading to an appealing, meaningful and effective programme*.

*The MST4Life™ stakeholder consultation provided us with valuable information that contributed towards programme success. For example, the need for a fun and 'hands-on' programme that avoided a classroom feel, as some young people did not engage well or had bad experiences in the school setting.

There are a number of different ways to conduct a stakeholder consultation, from using surveys to focus groups or interviews. The advantages and disadvantages of these methods are discussed in the evaluation section (see pages 12–14).

Some example strengths-based questions that you may wish to consider in your stakeholder consultation include:

- What are the attributes or qualities that young people require to thrive in day-to-day life?
- What is the best approach for working/ encouraging learning with this group?
- How could this programme complement existing services that you offer?
- What are the expected goals and outcomes of the programme?

Visit the resources page on our website for a sample topic guide to use in a stakeholder consultation – **www.sprintproject.org/ resources**.

Who, When, Where and What

Who receives the programme?

Age

- What activities to include in the programme and how these are delivered will depend on the age range and interests of young people and what is meaningful and enjoyable to them. For example, for 16–24-year-olds (as in MST4Life™), it is important to recognise that their brains are still developing[23 24], so consider activities that will be most engaging for them. For older participants, consider if more advanced content may be beneficial to positively challenge their learning.

Learning styles and needs

- By considering the learning style and needs of your clients your programme becomes more inclusive, and you are more likely to see greater engagement from participants. For example, some participants may have additional support needs, so you will need to make adjustments to your content, such as printing on coloured paper/with large font or having verbal conversations rather than writing exercises[25]. You may also want to ask your participants if they prefer a more formal teaching set-up or 'hands-on' approach, or, discuss what they have liked about previous courses they've completed.

Readiness to engage

- The programme content should be planned and adapted based on young peoples' readiness to engage with group-based activities, which will depend on their motivation for attending and previous experiences with similar programmes.
- If young people initially seem hesitant or they haven't 'bought-in' to the programme yet, we recommend including rapport-building activities first to help develop foundations of trust between those delivering and receiving the programme. Once rapport is developed, topics requiring deeper engagement could be introduced.
  - For example, an icebreaker of 'two truths, one lie' helps the group get to know each other, which might make them feel more comfortable in sharing their best hopes for the programme. For icebreaker ideas that have worked well in MST4Life™, see www.sprintproject.org/resources.
- A young person's readiness to engage may also depend on their capacity to self-regulate* (see Figure 1). From the self-regulation continuum, we can build a better understanding of what may be considered a 'successful' workshop or programme for different young people. For example, a young person with lower levels of self-regulation may only move slightly along the continuum but this may result in a big achievement, such as, completing a course for the first time.

***Self-regulation:**
The extent to which an individual is able to guide their thoughts, feelings and behaviours to reach goals (Bandura, 1991).

Top Tip!
Include appropriate methods to capture programme success especially for low self-regulators, where questionnaires may not detect progress. For more information on evaluation measures, see pages 12–14.

FIGURE 1 **Self-Regulation Continuum**

Characteristics of someone with lower self-regulation
- Unaware of their mental strengths
- Relies on others for direction, organisation and control of mood
- Other people are responsible for their failures/successes
- Lacks self-control
- Will not attend training courses without a lot of forceful encouragement

Characteristics of someone with higher self-regulation
- Uses a variety of mental techniques and skills
- Self-aware of thoughts, feelings and emotions
- High level of self-control
- Can organise themselves, set personal goals, monitors progress
- Will attend and complete most forms of training without much encouragement

Low self-regulator ⟵⟶ High self-regulator

Who delivers the programme ?

An internal staff member may know young people already and have better knowledge of the organisation, but they may not have had the opportunity to engage in specialist training. An external provider may come in with new ideas and perspectives, but they may also be considered an 'outsider' and it might take time for them to be integrated into the organisation.

Depending on the background of the young people, consider whether certain training or qualifications are preferable for the deliverer to have (eg, PIE training, Mental Health First Aid). If there are limited funds or resources available for training, you can download our psychologically informed delivery guide at **www.sprintproject.org/toolkit**. This evidence-based guide helps build confidence and competence to deliver in a psychologically informed style.

MST4Life™ was developed in collaboration with St Basils, but initially we were an external provider. Working closely together, we saw the partnership as an opportunity to train frontline staff to co-deliver MST4Life™ as part of the sustainability of the programme, which is now fully delivered by those staff. Could this approach work for your organisation?

Who supports the programme?

For the programme to be successful, consider who will be the key people to help support and advocate for the programme. We recognise that support staff can play a crucial role while the programme takes place but also in the longevity and sustainability of strengths-based practice.*

One way that staff within the organisation can facilitate success during the programme is through various recruitment and engagement strategies.

Such strategies could include:

- Text reminders
- Advertising posters
- Putting leaflets under doors

Staff should be guided by what works well within their organisation.

*One of our key lessons learned has been the value of support workers championing the programme to help with wrap-around support. If services aim to replicate the success of MST4Life™, having support workers who understand that young people need emotional and practical support to engage with the programme is key.

When the programme takes place

Pre-programme:

- Consider organising an 'induction' meeting for potential participants before the programme starts. This can help answer questions, alleviate concerns and start the rapport-building process. It is also an opportunity to find out about the young people (eg, interests) and what they might want from this programme. This is a particularly important step if they were not directly involved in the stakeholder consultation.

During the programme:

- Remember to take a person-centred approach and agree on a time that suits the young people. For example, those with caring responsibilities might not be able to do evening sessions, or those at college/work might not be able to attend daytime sessions, so find a balance that works best for those taking part.
- The duration of sessions will also depend on who is in your group. Consider shorter sessions for those who have not engaged well with courses previously, or consider longer sessions for an older group or those more efficient at self-regulating and reflecting.
- Consider how long your programme will last and what is realistic to cover in that time. It is better to focus on a few relevant concepts to ensure understanding rather than trying to cover more at a superficial level.

For example, the MST4Life™ delivery model of ten sessions and a residential was suitable for young people to benefit from taking part.

Where the programme takes place

- Stakeholder consultation location – this will likely be the first time you meet some of the stakeholders, so a location where they feel comfortable to share their views will help towards building a good relationship
- Programme location – this could be in the same place as the consultation, or could be somewhere different depending on the outcome of the planning discussions (eg, a local community centre for a floating support service).
- Try to remain person-centred and think about how the physical space aligns with a PIE. In other words, consider how the environment supports basic psychological needs*. For example, are the facilities appropriate in terms of:
  - Space – enough space for people to feel comfortable and be able to move around if activities are more 'hands-on'. Equally, is there a separate area to this space where participants can break from the session if they wish? If a topic is quite emotionally sensitive and participants aren't ready to join in with conversation yet then they may wish to break from the room at this time.
  - Toilets and refreshments – it may seem like common sense, but ensuring participants can freely access these basic requirements is conducive to achieving a comfortable PIE space.
- Planning ahead for barriers – it is possible that travel to the venue may be required for young people to attend. This may present a barrier to engaging if young people can't afford the cost of travel or don't feel comfortable taking public transport or a taxi. Consider how these barriers can be minimised where possible, for example, through budgeting for a petty cash allowance or being supported by a staff member attending with them.

*We all have **three basic psychological needs**[26]: Competence (desire to be effective and develop skills), Autonomy (desire to have choice and/or self-driven motivation to complete tasks) and Relatedness (desire to belong and be connected to others). To find out more about how to support these needs with young people, download our psychologically informed delivery guide at **www.sprintproject.org/toolkit**.

Competence **Autonomy** **Relatedness**

What to include in the programme

Content

What are the expected goals and learning outcomes of the programme? This will likely vary across different stakeholders (eg, funders vs potential participants), so try to align the content with key priorities. Drawing from our Mental Skills Training Toolkit (**www.sprintproject.org/toolkit**), the examples in Table 1 outline which of these tools can be integrated into your programme to achieve well-being goals/outcomes.

These learning outcomes could be considered the building block to supporting young people to go and thrive in other contexts, such as engagement in EET. This will likely be a long-term outcome so it will be important to manage expectations for when this might be achieved. For more suggestions about different outcomes, see the 'What' section of the evaluation.

Context

Once the goals and learning outcomes have been determined, plan for what the context is to achieve these outcomes. Based on Positive Youth Development literature[27], programme context is important for providing a transfer setting to develop and practise mental skills. The context could depend on young people's interests, such as sport, art, photography, outdoor adventure, team building challenges and so on.

Sport **Art** **Photography**

Outdoor adventure **Team building**

For example:

- If your outcome is to help re-engage young people with EET, provide opportunities within a meaningful setting for young people to practise leadership and communication skills (eg, including them as members on interview panels)
- If your outcome is to improve resilience, provide opportunities for young people to problem-solve and overcome meaningful challenges

TABLE 1

How programme goals can match tools in MST toolkit

PROGRAMME GOALS/OUTCOMES	TOOL
Self-awareness of strengths, self-confidence, resilience, self-worth	Strengths Profile
Attentional control, planning, problem-solving, self-regulation	Goal-setting
Planning ahead, problem-solving, positive mind-set, resilience	If/Then
Emotional awareness and regulation, reflection, self-worth	Emotional Awareness Grid
Problem-solving, self-regulation, resilience, self-awareness	STOP
Support seeking, awareness of social support, problem-solving, resilience	Dream Team

PREFACE TO NEXT SECTION

We've considered the key components of the planning process. However, planning doesn't end when the programme begins.

It's OK to adapt depending on what works best for the group, for example, changing the time of the sessions as you get to know the young people better.

We recommend monitoring and evaluating as you progress through delivering your programme. The next section will provide a comprehensive overview of **Why, What, How, When** and **Who** should take part in the evaluation.

EVALUATION

Evaluation is an important part of the overall programme implementation. It is an iterative process and does not start when the programme stops. Through planning and delivery, data can be collected to begin your evaluation.

Why evaluate?

There are many reasons to evaluate a programme, such as demonstrating a return on expectations. The term 'return on expectations' comes from the New World Kirkpatrick Model of evaluation which will frame this section. Before expanding upon The Kirkpatrick model and discussing different data collection methods used in an evaluation, we have outlined four key reasons why it is important to evaluate:

Process vs Outcome

In addition, it is important to consider processes and outcomes to give your evaluation explanatory power. If we understand how and why a programme works (ie, the processes), we can identify key aspects of the programme that must be replicated to achieve positive results (ie, the outcomes).

Investigate

Evaluating a programme is integral for determining why, if at all, a programme is effective. It's important to investigate why a programme does and/or doesn't work, to learn more about all aspects of the programme. Showing you've taken active steps to critically investigate the processes and outcomes of a programme adds credibility to your evaluation.

Inform

What we find from our evaluation informs what we do moving forward and, importantly, why we do it. Having a programme that is informed by data from key stakeholders gives the programme cultural relevance and adheres to a person-centred approach.

Improve

As a commissioner, practitioner or any member of staff working with young people, a shared vision of improving your service can be achieved through evaluation. An evaluation can highlight areas requiring change or things that are working well and should be maintained.

Impact

Evidence from an evaluation showcases the impact of your work; for example, the number of young people reached, outcomes achieved, or wider societal benefits. Showing the positive effects of your work can broaden the impact you have through shaping practice in other services or informing guidelines at policy level.

Processes are the cogs that help the programme run smoothly: in other words, they're the reason you're achieving your outcomes.

Outcomes are the end goal of the programme or the parameters for defining success.

How to evaluate

When considering how to evaluate there are two key factors: different data collection methods; and adopting a suitable framework to plan your evaluation. This section will be structured according to a commonly used evaluation framework used in a range of settings, including MST4Life™, called the New World Kirkpatrick Model of evaluation. Before outlining how this framework can be used to plan your evaluation, different data collections are outlined.

Quantitative (stats and facts)

- Quantitative data is typically collected through questionnaires, surveys, attendance records, or social inclusion status (ie, NEET–EET, moving on from housing service).
- When collecting quantitative data, it is important to apply an appropriate tool to capture your desired outcomes. For example, if you're aiming to measure resilience in 16–24-year-olds, you want to use a questionnaire that is appropriate for the age group and is a reliable measure of resilience. This can be a time-consuming process but will leave you with much more reliable and coherent data when evaluating your programme.

TABLE 2

Advantages and disadvantages of collecting quantitative data

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Helpful to depict patterns across a large sample size	May not capture a full range of experiences
Data collected can be more informative across a wider range of participants	Can exclude participants with learning difficulties
Findings can be supported by recognised standards for statistical significance	Expertise may be required to analyse and establish statistical significance of data
Results can make for strong evidence when making claims about the effectiveness of your programme	It may be considered a less engaging form of data collection for participants (eg, questionnaires)

Quantitative data (stats and facts)
Data that can be produced from numbers, scales and closed-ended questions (yes or no). Measurement methods like questionnaires, surveys and attendance records can provide us with this data

Notes

What quantitative data are you currently collecting?

What quantitative data could you collect to strengthen your evaluation?

Qualitative (talks and thoughts)

- Qualitative data is typically collected through open-ended questions and is a reflection of an individual or group's views, experiences or feedback.
- There are various ways to collect qualitative data, including interviews, focus groups, open-ended questions* within a questionnaire and diary rooms.

*Open-ended questions do not elicit a yes or no response. These can be difficult to generate, so an alternative approach is to ask a more closed question and follow up with asking the young person to explain their answer.

- The diary room is a technique used to evaluate MST4Life™. It is a flexible approach, where the main premise is to provide a physical space in which participants feel comfortable to share their views through open-ended questions*. The diary room was designed for participants to answer questions without the presence of the interviewer, as this limits the risk of participants saying what they think the interview wants to hear (also known as social desirability bias).

TABLE 3

Advantages and disadvantages of collecting qualitative data

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Detailed perspective of how the programme impacted an individual or group	Not as reliable as quantitative data (eg, greater risk of bias affecting results)
Findings can result in compelling case studies	Can be time consuming to collect and analyse
Gives participants an opportunity to be more expressive	Data collected can vary and be difficult to interpret
Uncover findings you may not have considered	You can be left with 'grey' data (ie, less conclusive)

However, having used this technique with young people experiencing homelessness, we know this approach isn't always desirable or favourable. Therefore, an interviewer could ask the questions, as to exclude a young person from engaging with the evaluation due to anxiety or learning difficulties is more harmful than collecting unbiased data.

Qualitative data (talks and thoughts)
Data collected from methods such as interviews, observations or reflective diaries. Findings reflect opinions and experiences which can shed light on reaction, learning and behavioural outcomes.

Notes

What qualitative data are you already collecting?

What qualitative data could you collect to strengthen your evaluation?

Mixed methods

- Mixed method data collection is an approach to overcoming the limitations of using qualitative or quantitative data alone.
- However, it is important to consider if a particular data collection method has more weight in your evaluation and to justify why. For example, you may choose to measure your core programme outcomes through quantitative data collection methods and use qualitative data methods to capture participants' feedback.

In MST4Life™, qualitative and quantitative methods were given equal importance. This decision was based on an evaluation plan to evidence the statistical significance of changes in participants and the economic impact of our programme (ie, quantitative); but also informed by the desires of stakeholders, which meant including more engaging data collections methods (ie, qualitative).

TABLE 4

Advantages and disadvantages of collecting mixed methods data

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Can offset the limitations of using a singular data collection method	Can be time consuming to collect many different forms of data
Leaves you with a comprehensive evaluation by capturing outcomes in a variety of different ways	A lot of data collected also means a lot of data to be analysed, which can be time consuming
Makes data collection more flexible, helping to meet the needs of participants and desires of funders	Justifying why one data collection method has more weight in your evaluation than another
Data from different methods can serve to confirm or challenge findings and conclusions from your evaluation	–

Mixed methods
The collection of quantitative and qualitative data. The different data can offset the strengths and limitations each method carries. For example, quantitative data cannot tell a rich, detailed case study, whereas qualitative data can. Equally, qualitative data cannot show clear patterns across large sample sizes in the way quantitative data can.

Notes

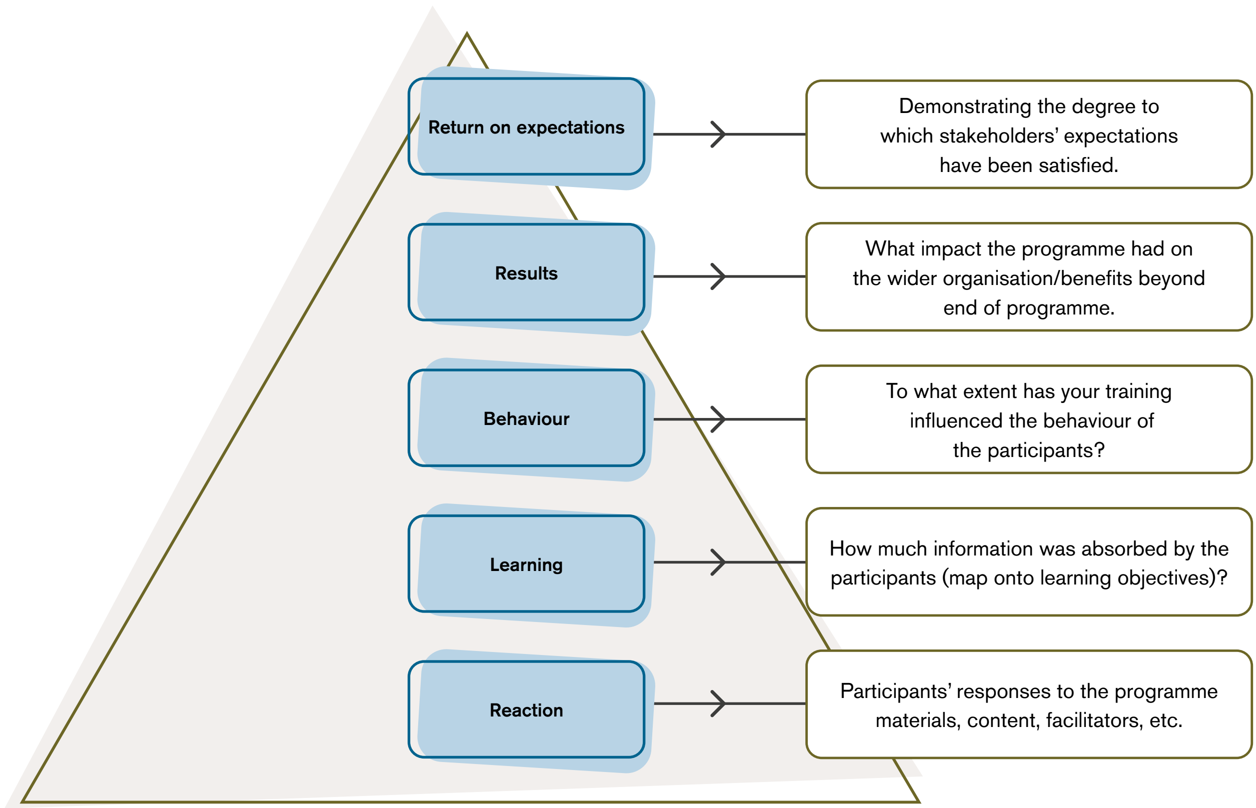
How could mixed methods data collection strengthen your evaluation?

Evaluation framework – The New World Kirkpatrick Model

The New World Kirkpatrick Model is a well researched and validated framework for planning and structuring programme evaluations (www.kirkpatrickpartners.com). It has five levels.

Building from the different levels of the model, we'll provide examples of what, how and when to evaluate and, importantly, who to include in your evaluation.

FIGURE 3 **The New World Kirkpatrick Model of evaluation**



Level 5

Return on expectations

In the guiding principles of the Kirkpatrick model, return on expectations is described as the 'ultimate indicator of value'. Therefore, how we can evidence a return on expectations is the starting point for planning our evaluation. For example, you might start with the organisation's mission statement which your programme helps them to achieve, or you may want to focus on core targets you need to meet to justify funding (see example in Table 5).

With a return on expectations in mind, the remainder of the section will provide examples of how to showcase the effectiveness of your programme using the Kirkpatrick model. Though it may seem counterintuitive, we're going to work back from level 4 (Results) and illustrate the steps to planning and implementing a detailed evaluation.

Return on investment

Return on expectations is a pertinent level of the Kirkpatrick model; however, as this model has been applied in business, this level has been expanded by other users to include 'return on investment'.

From the organisation Skills Hub (**www.skillshub.com**), Sean McPheat (CEO) presents a simple formula for calculating return on investment:

ROI % = (£ Benefit of Training – £ Cost of Training) / Cost of Training

Depending on the sector you're working in, estimating the cost benefit of training can be complex. It's important to factor in all the costs incurred for implementation of the programme (eg, facilities, wages, resources). When estimating the cost benefit of your programme, the most reliable estimates are based upon comparison data (ie, cost benefits to an organisation and their clients, vs a comparable organisation not receiving the programme), and from complete data sets (ie, you have as much of the relevant data as possible to draw accurate conclusions).

In some sectors it may be unethical to withhold a programme that you know could benefit clients or you may have no choice but to work from incomplete data sets. Regardless, it is always recommended that you are transparent with how your cost benefits were estimated and to be conservative with estimates.

Return on expectations
What a successful training initiative delivers to key business stakeholders, demonstrating the degree to which their expectations have been satisfied.

Return on investment
The ratio of money gained or lost (whether realised or unrealised) on an investment, relative to the amount of money invested.

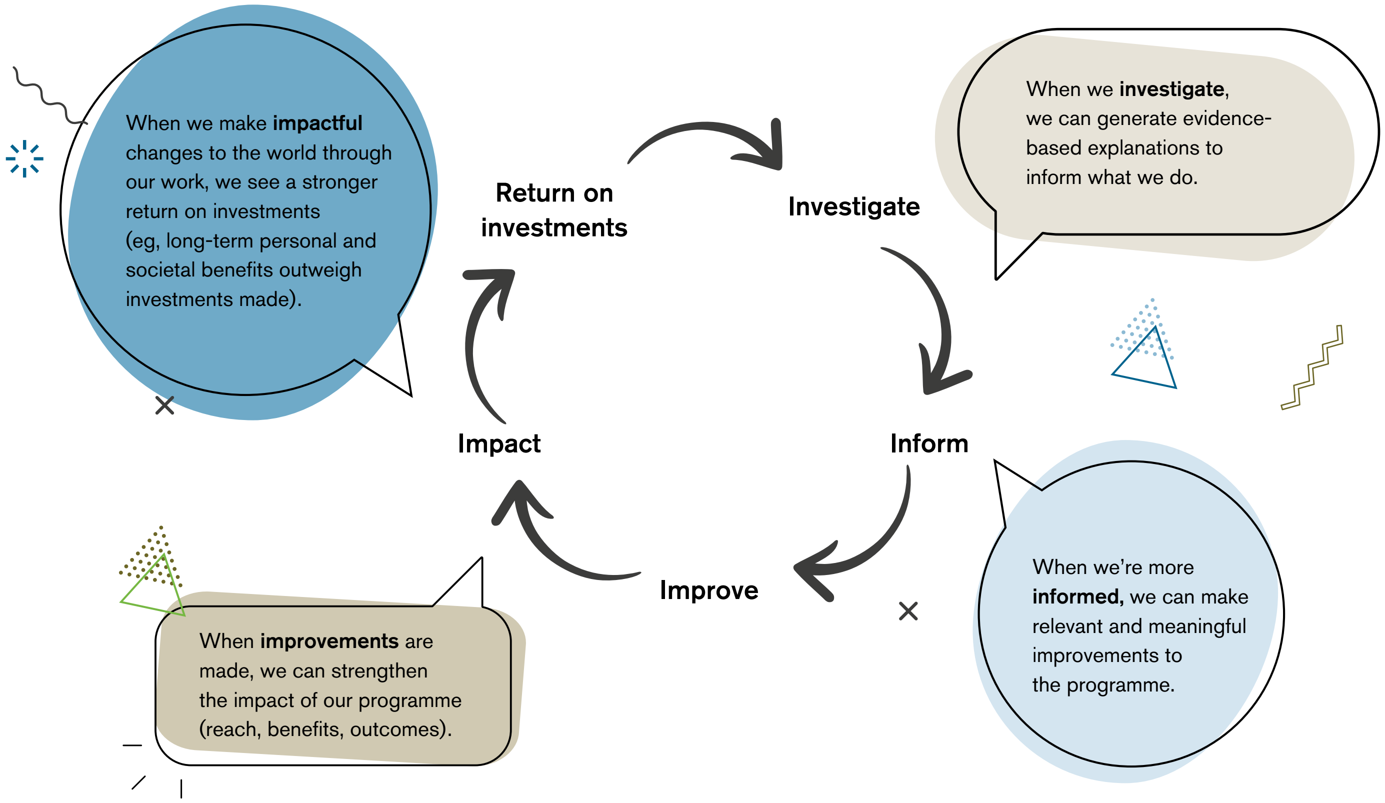
TABLE 5

Example of planning an evaluation to show return on expectations and investments

ORGANISATIONAL EXPECTATIONS	RETURN ON EXPECTATIONS
Example mission statement: *'Our organisation aims to provide a service in which young people feel safe, secure and protected. From here, we work with young people, supporting them to thrive in society, preparing them for education, employment or training opportunities, and subsequently, independent living. Through this approach, we hope to reduce inequalities in disadvantaged young people.'*	**Reaction:** *'Young people feel safe, secure, and protected'* How can your evaluation show that participants feel this way when taking part in your programme?
	Learning: *'Preparing them for education, employment or training opportunities'* What skills have your participants learned that fulfil this expectation?
	Behaviour: *'Thrive in society... independent living'* What measures can you include to capture these changes?
	Results: *'Reduce inequalities in disadvantaged young people'* To what extent does your evaluation support this broader goal of the organisation?

FUNDERS EXPECTATIONS	RETURN ON INVESTMENT
Example milestone: Engage 100–150 young people per year	Measure attendance and engagement in programme (**Reaction**)
Example milestone: Train 20–30 staff to deliver programme	Evidence that staff have learned the required skills to deliver the programme (**Learning**), and have delivered or co-delivered the programme (**Behaviour**)

FIGURE 2 **Why it's important to evaluate in a cyclical format**



Notes

To show return on expectations/ investments I need to...

Level 4

Results

When measuring results of the programme, it's important to consider how the programme has benefitted the wider organisation (see Table 5). An important consideration for an evaluation of results are the 'leading indicators'.

What to look for when capturing results
Leading indicators are the measurable outcomes we can attribute to the overall results of the programme. Indicators of results are also seen as outcomes that can make the evaluation relevant to the organisation, identifying the specific 'needs' that are required for the result. For example, if the result is to 'improve educational outcomes', then participants of your programme 'need' to leave your programme with something that indicates this result has been met (eg, accredited qualification).

In the example below, we've used 'improved well-being' as a general result and depicted the different levels this could include and leading indicators that could be measured (see Figure 4).

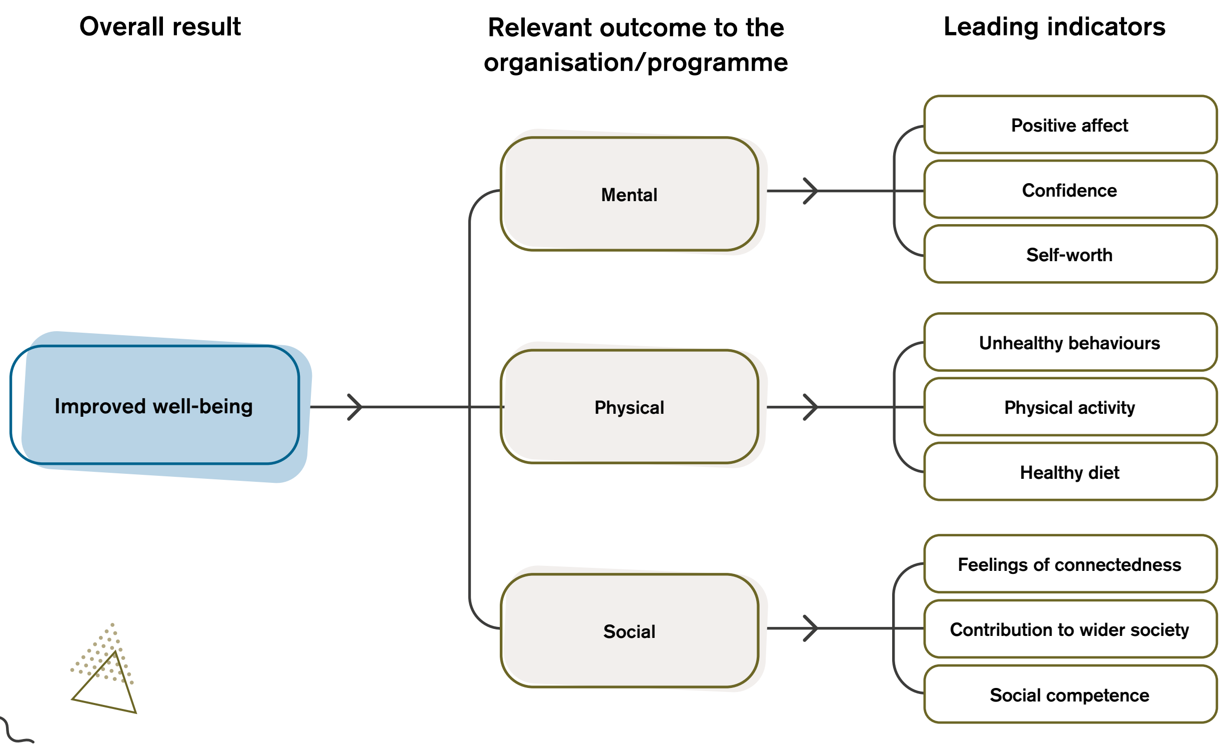
How to capture results
The best way to capture results and leading indicators is with more definitive findings, exemplified through quantitative data (see on page 12). This can give investors, funders or an organisation a clear answer as to whether or not your programme has delivered on expectations or investments.

When to capture results
To fully illustrate the impact of your programme on results you want to collect data at baseline (ie, start of programme), when your programme finishes and a follow-up (ie, >3 months down the line). By measuring your leading indicators at all three time points your evaluation is more effective at capturing change and therefore possible impact. For example, if your programme aims to reduce social exclusion in young people, you might want to measure NEET status at the start of the programme. When measured again at the end, you'll know the short-term impact of your programme. When measured again at follow-up, you'll have an idea of the long-term impact of your programme, which is a good indication of return on investment, as the sustained benefits of your programme can indicate potential cost benefits.

Results
What impact has your programme had on the wider organisation/benefits beyond the end of programme?

Who to collect data from?
Ultimately, the results of your programme will be reflected in data collected from your participants. However, collecting data at an organisational level could also be beneficial to evidence how your programme has an impact on a broader scale (ie, change in NEET status; number of young people with educational qualifications).

FIGURE 4 **The complexities of well-being and identifying leading indicators**



Level 3

Behaviour
The degree to which participants can apply what they have learned from your programme to other settings.

Behaviour

Behavioural outcomes reflect the extent to which your programme has influenced participants' actions away from the programme setting. This may include their conduct in a wider service or organisation, or in a deliberate transfer setting within the programme. In the case of MST4Life™, the outdoors component of the programme is used as a transfer setting to consolidate learning and an opportunity to observe behavioural changes first hand.

What to look for when capturing behaviour
In programme evaluations, behavioural outcomes can be overlooked as they're difficult to capture, or we expect linear pathways between learning and results. However, defining critical behaviours that underpin results is an important step to building explanatory power in your evaluation (ie, why a result has been achieved). When thinking about critical behaviours, it is helpful to define what this behaviour looks like and how it can lead to changes in results (see Figure 5).

How to capture behavioural outcomes and who to consider
Behavioural outcomes are typically captured through qualitative methods as it is difficult to quantify behaviour. For example, we know that self-regulation can vary drastically between young people. Whilst an improvement in self-regulation for one participant may be staying in the room for the duration of a workshop, for another this might seem straightforward. Therefore, you need to collect data that can contextualise the behavioural changes observed.

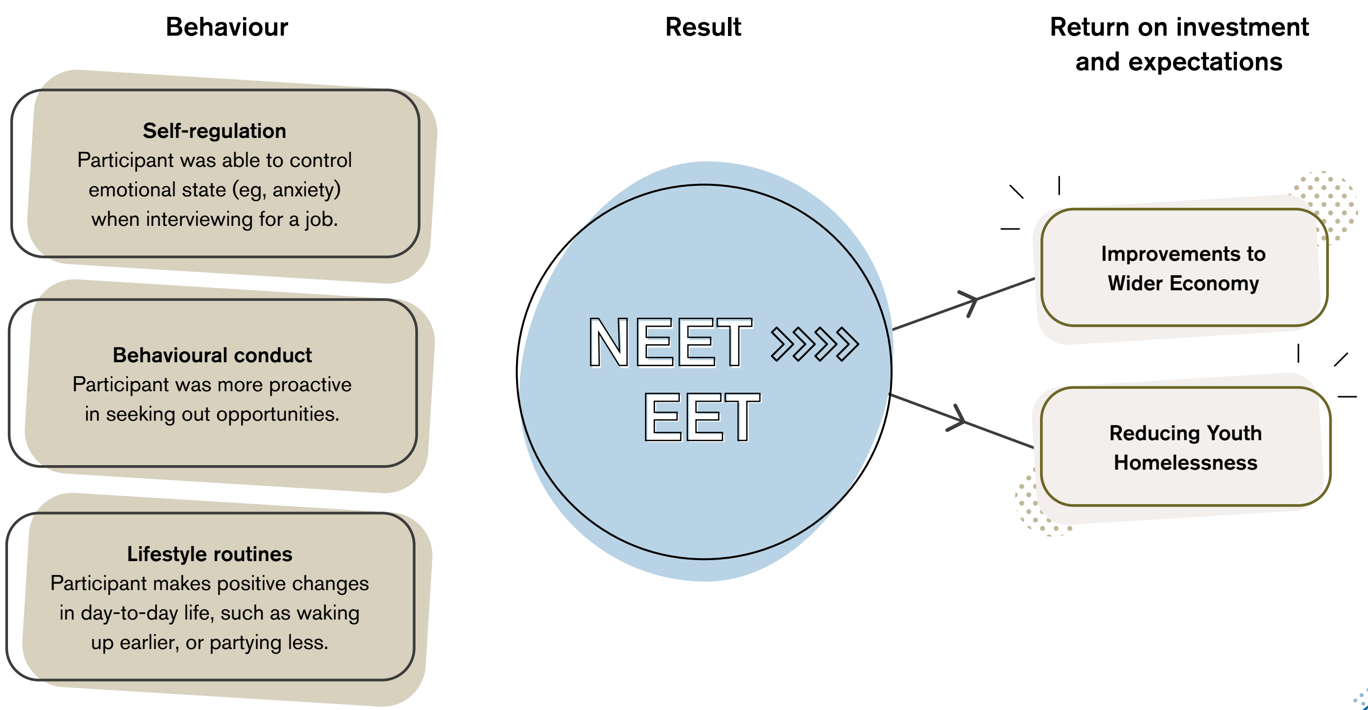
How to collect observational data will vary depending on who you are collecting the data from. For example, you may interview staff from the organisation regarding observed changes in day-to-day behaviour of participants away from the programme. Alternatively, programme deliverers may want to take reflective notes of behavioural changes they've observed throughout the programme, specifically in transfer settings. Collecting data from staff and deliverers can be beneficial as they may be more attuned to noticing subtle differences that young people themselves overlook.

We know that participants can be experts in recognising their own changes. Therefore, it is important to ask their opinion on how they feel the programme has affected their behaviour away from the programme. A benefit of talking directly to young people is that they may be able to bring to light personal changes that otherwise would not have been captured through staff or deliverers.

When to capture behavioural outcomes
As previously mentioned, the best time to capture behavioural changes is when a transfer setting is introduced to the programme. Observing how participants behave in a new context reflects the extent to which they've been able to transfer learning from the programme.

With regards to timing, it is advantageous to collect data throughout the programme as this can depict behavioural changes over time or in significant moments. For example, if the deliverer takes consistent notes after each workshop regarding participants' behaviour, they can identify particular workshops that have elicited stronger behavioural changes.

FIGURE 5 **Critical behaviours that can underpin results**



Level 2

Learning

Learning outcomes are considered to reflect how much information was absorbed by participants, which in turn, is likely to impact the degree of behavioural change observed. Therefore, to explain observed behavioural changes, we must capture relevant learning outcomes (see page 10 in planning section).

What to capture when measuring learning?
If we consider learning outcomes to underpin behavioural changes, it is important for participants to be learning the appropriate skills that can facilitate this. In MST4Life™, a critical behavioural outcome was self-regulation and throughout the programme, participants had opportunities to learn personal and social skills to build their capacity to adaptively self-regulate (see Figure 6).

How to capture learning outcomes?
For learning, a mixed methods approach is likely to be most advantageous (read more about mixed methods on page 14).

Using mixed methods when evaluating learning outcomes gives you opportunity to showcase a breadth and depth of learning across large sample sizes (quantitative). However, you can also ask open-ended questions which give you an insight into how learning impacted behaviours (qualitative). For example, you could ask, ‘What, if anything, have you learned about yourself from taking part in this course?’ and follow on with a question like, ‘To what extent has this impacted your day-to-day life away from the programme?’

You can also see changes in learning from the materials participants complete in the programme, so collecting copies of these can be a good way of evidencing progression throughout the programme.

On the next page are some examples of how learning outcomes can be captured through a mixed methods approach.

Learning
The degree to which participants acquired the intended knowledge, skills or assets through participation in the programme.

FIGURE 6 **Core life skills that underpin self-regulation in MST4Life™**

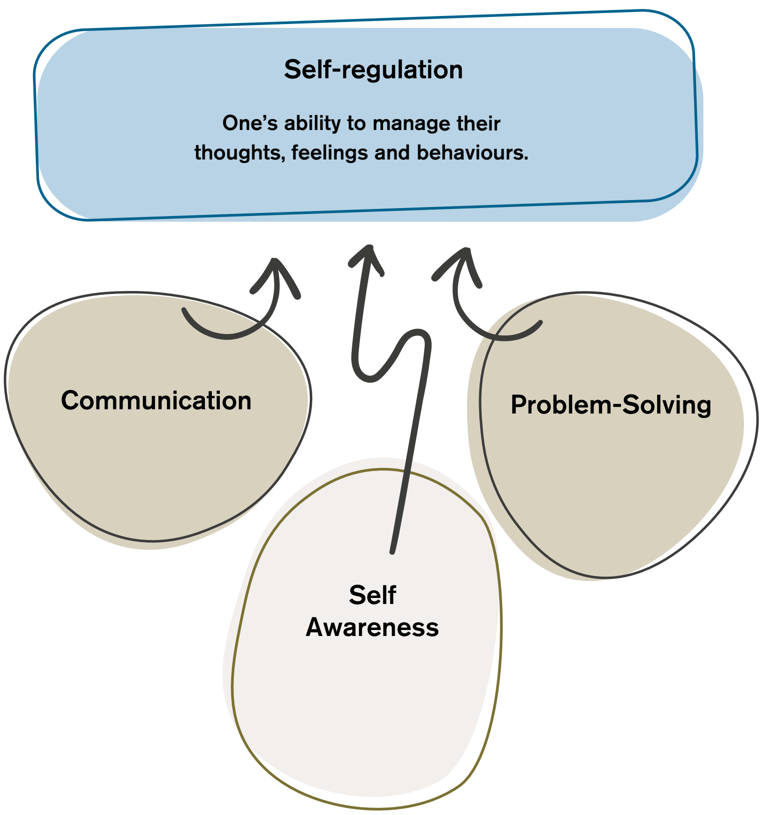


TABLE 6

How learning outcomes can be captured through a mixed methods approach

LEARNING OUTCOMES	QUANTITATIVE *EXAMPLE QUESTION*	QUALITATIVE *EXAMPLE QUESTION*
Resilience	Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC; Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007)[28] *I can achieve my goals despite obstacles (1 = not true at all, 5 = true nearly all of the time)*	Diary room *To what extent, if at all, has this programme impacted the way you respond to challenges or setbacks?*
Well-being	The EPOCH measure of adolescent well-being (Kern et al., 2016)[29] *I am optimistic about my future (1 = not true at all, 5 = true nearly all of the time)*	Focus group *How, if at all, would you say the programme has impacted on your views of the future?*
Self-concept	Self-description questionnaire III (Marsh & O'Neill, 1984)[30] *Overall I have a lot of respect for myself (1 = false, 5 = true)*	Interview *In what ways, if at all, has this programme changed the way you see yourself?*

When to capture learning outcomes?
For quantitative measures of learning there is value in collecting data at baseline (ie, first workshop) and post-programme (ie, last workshop) to present changes which are most likely to have been facilitated through the programme. Follow-up measures (ie, >3 months) are also beneficial to show the sustained impact of your programme; yet, it is worth bearing in mind that other influences in participants' lives could impact your findings.

Qualitative data can likely be collected throughout the programme, but you may wish to have more targeted questions that are relevant to particular workshops. This can reflect the extent to which a workshop was successful in promoting the desired learning outcomes. However, we also know that learning can take time to be absorbed; so, it may be worth including questions that reflect back on previous weeks. There are also benefits to collecting follow-up qualitative data to discuss with participants what they learned from the programme and how, if at all, it has impacted on their behaviour since.

Who to consider when capturing learning outcomes?
The main people to consider when capturing learning outcomes are the participants themselves as your aim is to understand the extent to which knowledge has been absorbed. However, staff that work with them on a daily basis and deliverers of the programme are also well placed to observe learning in participants (eg, observing changes in how the participant refers to themselves or demonstrating certain competencies).

Level 1

Reaction

How young people react to the programme is ultimately the first step in triggering the additional levels discussed. For example, to create as many opportunities for learning as possible, we need to ensure participants respond favourably to the programme and have an intrinsic drive to attend.

Intrinsic drive – a motivation to act that stems from personal value or desire; for example, enjoyment, personal development, to feel competent, connected or satisfied, are indicators of intrinsic drive.

What to capture when measuring reaction

This may appear straightforward, capturing outcomes, such as, enjoyment, satisfaction, likes, dislikes, or generally how the programme made participants feel. However, there is more to consider; for example, what left participants feeling satisfied or unsatisfied? Here, you may want to diversify your questions to capture satisfaction with programme content, as well as how it was delivered (ie, satisfaction with programme deliverers). Furthermore, you may wish to also include attendance and engagement records to reflect participants' reactions (ie, low attendance may be a sign of negative reaction).

However, reactions alone may not tell the whole story; in addition, you also want to understand why your programme was triggering certain reactions. To do this you need to conduct fidelity or quality assurance checks. Quality assurance checks are a good way of evaluating if your programme was delivered as intended; for example, by knowing whether or not a programme adhered to delivery guidelines of supporting participants' psychological needs. This can give a better understanding as to why participants felt more or less satisfied with the programme delivery style.

Measuring quality assurance and reactions to the programme is also a good indicator of return on expectations. For example, if the organisation expects the programme to adhere to certain delivery guidelines or has an ethos of promoting subjective well-being (ie, enjoyment), quality assurance and reaction data are evidence of the extent to which the programme met those expectations.

Reaction

The degree to which participants respond favourably to the programme (eg, enjoyment, satisfaction).

Fidelity/Quality assurance

The extent to which a programme was delivered as intended. In the example of MST4Life™, all deliverers of the programme are observed and complete reflections to measure the extent to which their delivery style supported participants' basic psychological needs. In doing so, when evaluating reactions, data can be contextualised by how the programme was delivered, and from there, it is easier to identify how the programme is facilitating participant reactions.

How to capture reactions

Similar to learning outcomes, reactions are best captured through a mixed methods approach. This can be most effective when measuring quality assurance. For example, observations and self-reflections (qualitative) can be complemented with a scoring system to measure performance (quantitative). Moreover, data from observations can then be compared to self-reflections to measure how accurate deliverers are in personal evaluations. Discrepancies between observer and deliverer data can be an indication that more training is required.

In the table below there are examples for how reactions and fidelity can be captured via qualitative and quantitative measures.

When to capture reactions

Reactions are best captured towards the end of the programme; however, data like attendance and engagement, should be collected throughout. As for quality assurance checks, you may wish to observe random sessions throughout the programme, or targeted ones which may be more challenging to deliver or are conducted away from the normal programme context.

Who to consider when measuring reactions?

Reactions to the programme are most accurately reflected by participants themselves. Aside from participants, it is also important to consider how staff respond, in particular frontline staff, who can be seen as influential gatekeepers to the programme given their role in promoting it to young people and supporting them to attend.

For quality assurance checks, it is important to consider who might conduct observations of the deliverers. When conducted in MST4Life™, observers were PhD students who received training in using a bespoke behavioural checklist, and received training to enhance their understanding of the programme. Importantly, observers were also not involved in the delivery of the programme – this helped to reduce the risk of bias when observing.

TABLE 7

How to use mixed methods data collection to capture Reaction outcomes

	REACTION	FIDELITY/QUALITY ASSURANCE
QUALITATIVE	Diary room question like: '*How do you feel about attending the programme?*' Collecting observational data of participants engagement during the programme Focus groups that give participants an opportunity share feedback on the programme (likes and dislikes)	Have deliverers of the programme complete diaries where they can reflect on their delivery style Collect observational data to evaluate the delivery style of the programme leaders Focus groups with participants to discuss their views on delivery style or programme atmosphere
QUANTITATIVE	Questionnaire that includes questions like: *'On a scale of severely dislike (1), to, very much enjoyed (5), how would you rate your experience of the programme?'* Visual surveys that include a range of smile emojis to reflect workshop satisfaction	To complement observations and self-reflections, scaling questions can be used to capture how deliverers scored their own performance Checklists and scoring systems for delivery guidelines can be established to help to standardise observational data

Barriers to evaluation

Ethical considerations
When collecting data from participants, it is important to ensure you have an appropriate way of storing data securely and safely. Moreover, it is important to collect informed consent to use participants' data in any dissemination of your evaluation (eg, reports).

Who has the loudest voice?
When considering who takes part in the evaluation of your programme, it is also worth considering who has the 'loudest voice', or the largest sway in decisions. This may vary depending on the level at which change is required; for example, there may be organisational decisions in which management or staff's points of views take priority. However, to adhere to a participant-centred approach, participants need to have their voices heard and acted upon in the planning, delivery and evaluation stages of the programme.

Gathering longer-term findings
Longer-term data can indicate the sustained benefits of your programme; however, it can be difficult to track participants for follow-up data. Instead, interviews with staff may be an alternative approach to understanding the longer-term impact of the programme.

Time and resources
Evaluating a programme can be a time – consuming and resource – intensive task. To overcome this barrier, it is important to have a thorough evaluation plan in place and adjust working schedules to allow for data collection and analysis. Resources such recording devices, appropriate software for data (eg, SPSS, R) and person power, all need to be considered when estimating the cost of your programme.

Notes

What barriers to evaluation might apply in your organisation?

What are some possible enablers to evaluation that already exist in your organisation? (eg, data already being collected, trained researchers, resources and software)

IMPLEMENTATION

Having discussed the intricacies of planning and evaluating a programme, this section focuses on implementing what we find out from an evaluation.

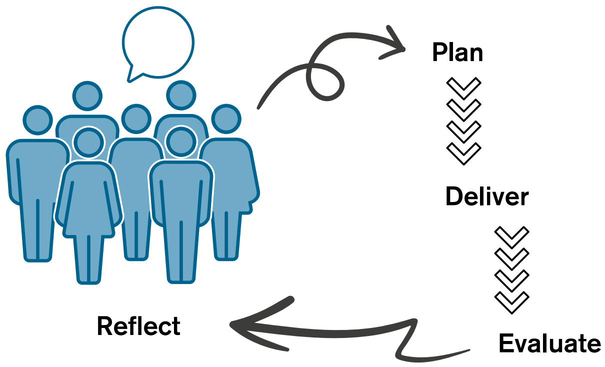
Action research

Action research is a process that ties together the planning, delivery and evaluation into iterative cycles which propel a programme to adapt based on evidence-based decisions.

By adopting an action research approach, it is evident you are listening to feedback from key stakeholders to inform future programme implementation. In doing so, stakeholders have a greater sense of ownership over the programme.

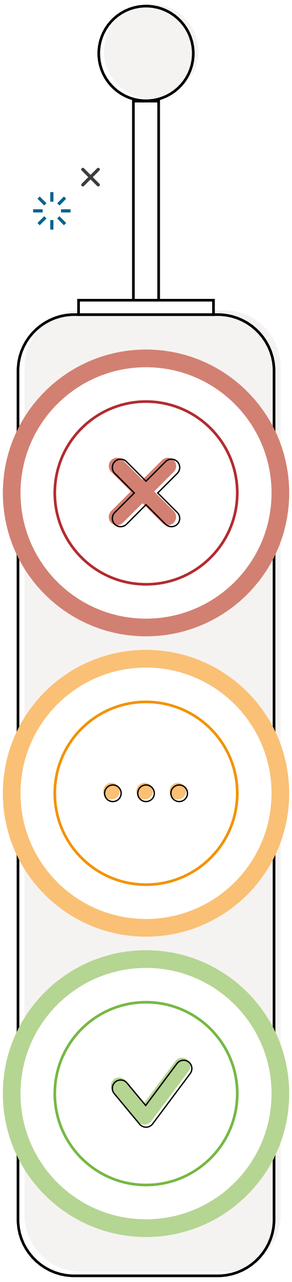
A key element of action research is taking time to reflect. This may involve data analysis and interpretation, and discussions with wider stakeholders or management. Time to reflect should be factored into the time scale when considering how to roll out the programme on a larger scale. Without reflection, there is a risk the programme will not have a chance to grow and adapt.

FIGURE 7 **Action research cycle**



Stop. Start. Continue.

This is a helpful tool to put the findings of your evaluation into action. These points should always be discussed thoroughly before making any decisions. A good guiding question might be, *'Are the changes we plan to make going to improve the programme we deliver?'*



STOP

Analyse the data you have collected to identify what did not work. This may include: programme accessibility (time and location), content (certain sessions didn't work), or the approaches of facilitators (behaviours were not supportive of their needs). This may come from programme recipients or facilitators, organisation staff, or management. The important thing to consider is **why** you are stopping something. What is the justification? Who has the loudest/most influential voice and why?

START

Our data or general observations can also teach us what we need to start doing to ensure the programme runs smoothly and participants get the best possible experience. For example, you may have made a change during the programme that participants requested and responded positively to; therefore, in future iterations, you may want to start making this a regular feature.

CONTINUE

As well as what may be changed, consider what elements of the programme you might want to keep the same for continuity purposes or because they worked well. This might be simple things like starting each session with an icebreaker, or processes that were effective in programme organisation, like communication between staff.

CASE STUDY

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE: MST4LIFE™

MST4Life™ implemented an action research framework from the initial pilot programme and every programme thereafter throughout the six-year partnership with St Basils. As a result, the programme underwent a number of evidence-based changes. Some of these changes are outlined below, as are the decision-making processes that underpinned them.

Changing the name of the programme

- The programme was initially called Mental Skills Training for Life to capture our sport psychology approach and make the programme feel less stigmatising. However, staff and young people fed back to us that the word 'Mental' was in itself stigmatising and gave the impression that the programme was about mental health, which was a barrier to young people attending and engaging with the programme.
- It was clear the programme needed a new name. We invited our key stakeholders to suggest new names for the programme based on what they thought were the key messages from it. With a shortlist of five new names, a service-wide vote was carried out for renaming the programme. The overwhelming winner was, My Strengths Training for Life. The new name ticked a lot of boxes, it meant people could continue to use the abbreviated name 'MST', the programme was perceived as less stigmatising for young people, and the new name still captured our strengths-based approach.

Changing the strengths profile

- The initial strengths profile used in the programme was derived from sport psychology and adapted from the community setting based on feedback from stakeholders during the programme planning stage. However, in later iterations of the programme we received feedback from young people and staff that they felt the strengths profile was too 'paper work heavy' and number based.
- With this feedback in mind, we consulted with stakeholders to design a more user-friendly version of the tool. Oftentimes, we would bring two or three variations of the tool when delivering the relevant workshop to give young people choice regarding what version they wanted to use – this was also a good way of collecting feedback through informal discussions and observations. The current strengths profile is now more interactive and user friendly, but has not lost the important messages regarding self-awareness and goal-setting (you can find this tool on our website – **www.sprintproject.org**).

Changing the time frame of the programme

- Initially, MST4Life™ was delivered over a ten-week period, with one workshop per week. In the programme planning stage, this time frame was thought to be a good length of time to sustain engagement and attendance, as well as, facilitate learning and behaviour change.
- However, when analysing attendance data and collecting feedback from stakeholders, we noticed there was a pattern of attendance dropping off towards the end of the ten weeks. It was suggested by stakeholders that a possible reason for the drop off was due to a loss of momentum; for example, with one workshop per week for ten weeks, if a young person missed a workshop, there would be a two-week gap before they could reengage. After additional stakeholder consultations, MST4Life™ was adapted to a five-week time frame, with two workshops per week. Both the five-week and ten-week variations of the programme are now presented to staff and young people during programme planning stage to ensure the service provided best meets the needs of those who receive it.

Summary checklist – have you considered the following steps?

Planning

- [ ] Conduct a stakeholder consultation
- [ ] Who will receive the programme?
- [ ] Who will deliver the programme?
- [ ] Who will support the programme?
- [ ] When will the intervention take place?
- [ ] Where will the intervention take place?
- [ ] What will the content and context of the programme be?

Evaluation

- [ ] Have you considered what data collection method is more appropriate for your evaluation?
- [ ] How are you providing evidence for return on expectations or investment?
- [ ] Are the results you're measuring a good indicator of success for your programme?
- [ ] What are some critical behaviours that could be influential in a participant achieving positive results?
- [ ] What are the most appropriate measurement tools to capture relevant learning outcomes?
- [ ] What are participants' reactions to your programme telling you about fidelity and quality assurance?

Implementation

- [ ] Listen to feedback to inform implementation of the programme
- [ ] Take time to reflect
- [ ] Stop. Start. Continue.
- [ ] What does this look like in practice?

CONCLUSION

Takeaway messages

1 Structure evaluation within a recognised framework

This will provide a more effective evaluation (eg, using the Kirkpatrick model). Including evaluation in the planning phase helps identify different outcomes, where different perspectives can help to see the bigger picture.

2 The short-term cost for long-term payoff

Though some suggestions may seem time consuming, producing a rigorous programme will reap its rewards in a high-quality programme that is effective and engaging for young people. Taking shortcuts in planning and evaluation means risking reinventing wheels and a misinvestment of valuable time and resources.

3 Be sure to read our other resources

This toolkit is one of three we have developed. Visit our website (www.sprintproject.org) to download our toolkits on strengths-based tools and how to deliver them in a psychologically informed way.

4 Use the skills and expertise of your partners

In the case study of MST4Life™, this is a collaborative body of work that builds from expertise in the youth homeless sector and academic approaches to programme development.

5 Pathways to effective communication

A programme will work most effectively when stakeholders have clear and regular communication. This can help identify changes required, share important information, and provide the foundation to a collaborative relationship.

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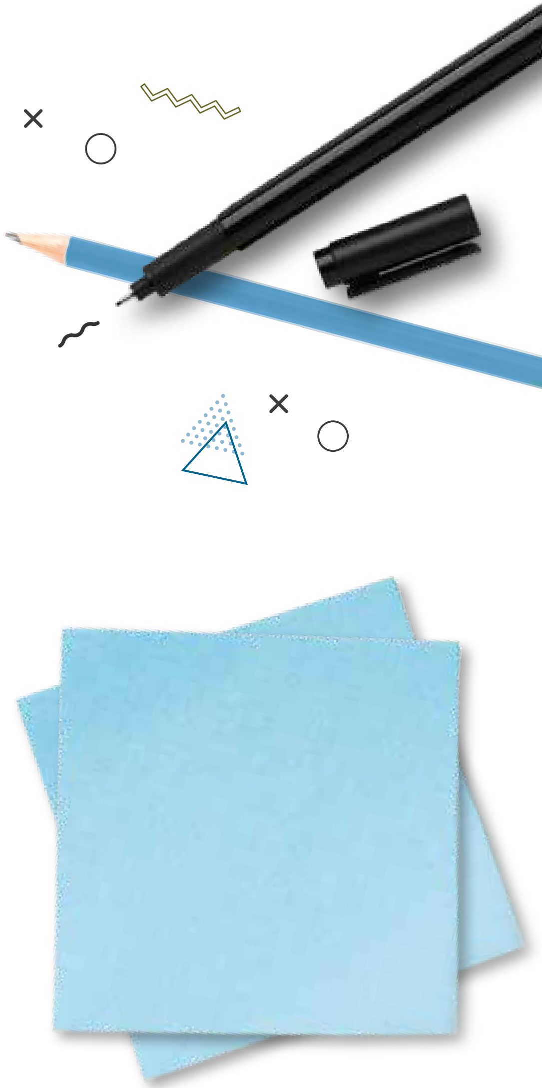

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